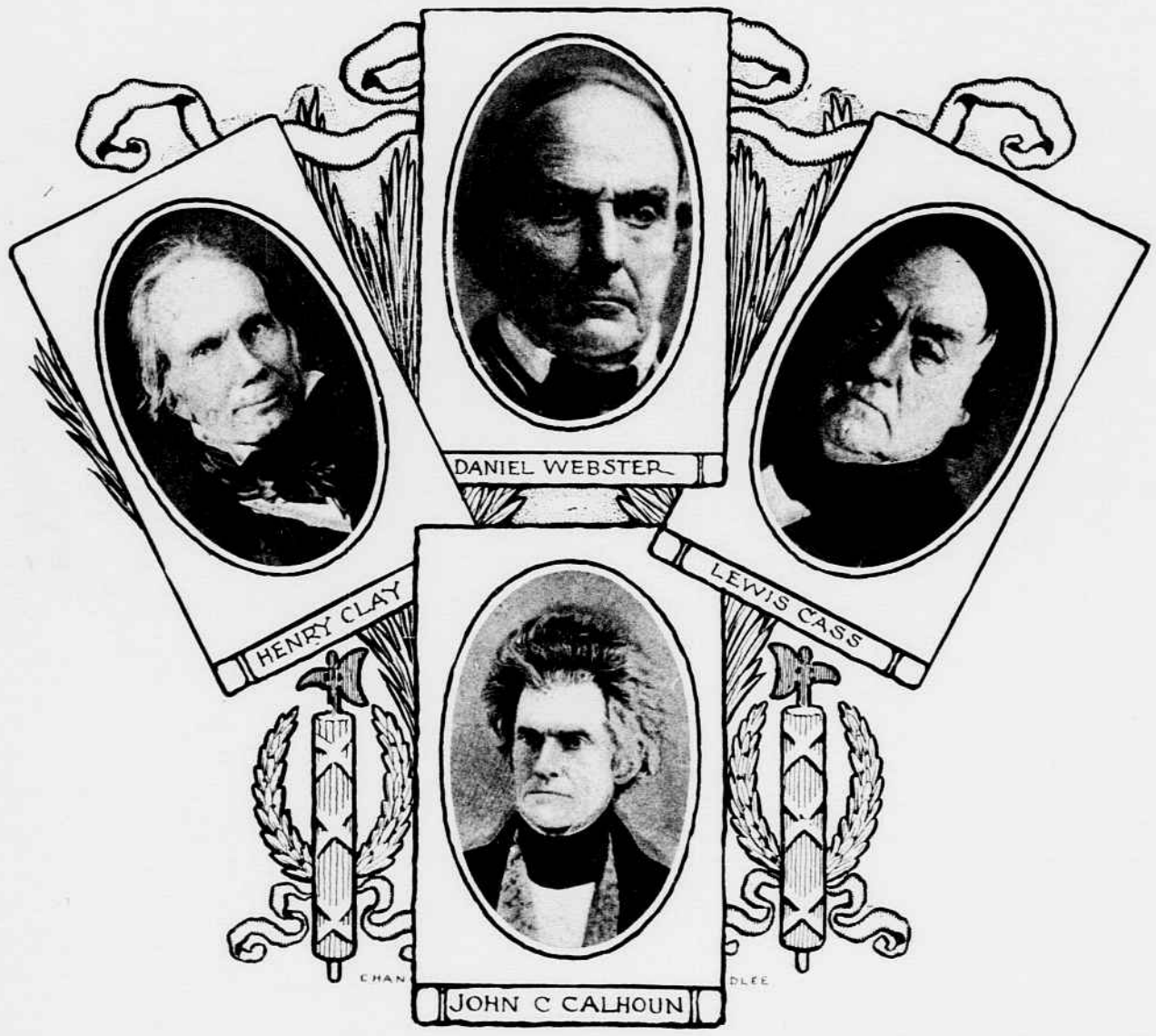


for the adequate punishment of reporters who published their proceedings in sacred secret session. They would have liked to cook the offenders in boiling oil, but had to content themselves with imprisoning them for a season and having to pay a heavy bill in the end for the luxurious entertainment of the prisoners.

All that has been changed now and Congress and the correspondents are on terms of the most distinguished consideration mutually. An efficient press committee regulates the reporters' galleries and keeps out the lobbyists and black sheep generally.

The successful evolution of the Gridiron Club from the numerous press clubs that have sprung up from time to time, and died out through internal dissensions or bad management, has been one of the main causes for the higher standing of the corps and the better feeling existing between public men and the correspondents. The most distinguished personages in the land, from the President down, are glad to accept an invitation to a Gridiron dinner, where they

**Mr. Joseph Gales.**

are royally entertained with things good to eat and drink, and treated to a good-tempered carnival of song, fun and frolic, lasting from the start until midnight. And every entertainment is declared to be the very best possible, until the next one comes and proves that there is no ultimate or limit to the infinite variety of resources of the Gridiron boys.

### Newspapers in Washington Fifty-sixty Years Ago.

The bull of the Irish historian who headed a chapter

"THE SNAKES OF IRELAND,"

and went on to say "there are no snakes in Ireland," is closely parodied by the addendum to an article under the head of "The Newspapers of Washington Fifty-sixty Years Ago." There were, properly speaking, no newspapers in Washington at that time. They were vigorous party organs, devoted to politics and depending for their support on party patronage. They expended nothing for news. During the Mexican war, the most important news event of the period, every scrap of intelligence concerning that contest, was copied by the Washington journals from outside papers. They ignored both general news and local happenings. The National Intelligencer, the paper most closely identified with the city and its people, instructed its single local reporter to limit his matter to "half a column of respectable commonplace."

On that first day of January, 1848, when I entered Washington, the Intelligencer contained a government advertisement of mail lettings covering six pages, a belated report of the Secretary of the Navy, not a word of news, and the following editorial announcement:

"No southern mail yesterday and therefore no news. Neither House of Congress was in session and therefore nothing from our reporters. The army court-martial (on General Fremont) did not sit in consequence of the illness of the president.

"We had intended to insert today the official report of Thursday's debate in the Senate, but we were not able to obtain a copy of it yesterday until our columns were otherwise occupied. It will be inserted in Monday's paper."

The Daily Union, the Polk organ, of the same day, January 1, 1848, had the congressional proceedings of the previous Thursday, the long advertisement of the mail lettings, two or three columns of ponderous editorial and not a line of news, local or general.

The editors of that time were not only slow in publishing the news, but slower yet in making editorial comment upon news events or any other important current topics. They required time for incubation before hatching.

The Intelligencer of March 20, 1848, gave the news of the revolution in France and the abdication of Louis Philippe, without a word of editorial comment, but on the 27th of March, a week later, it had an editorial on the subject covering the whole of one of its wide pages and a column on the next page. Then, after a week's further consideration, the Intelligencer, on the 7th of April, had another editorial on "The Revolution in France" four columns long.

Hudson, in his "History of Journalism," referring to the length of time taken by the editors of old for reflection and consideration before they made up their minds what to say on public matters, mentions that the annual message of President Jefferson of 1801 was published in the New York Evening Post on the 12th of December, and it was the 17th before any editorial notice was taken of it.

Of the great party organs of old, the ablest, most dignified and longest lived was the National Intelligencer. At a time when coarse vituperation and foul personal abuse were the choice weapons of the editorial armory, the Intelligencer always maintained its calm judicial temper. And when an adversary resorted to this line of attack and "hit below the belt," the Intelligencer dropped the controversy then and there and would take no further notice of the offender.

Joseph Gales and William W. Seaton did much to raise the standard of journalism in their paper, as in their honorable, useful, kindly lives they helped greatly to elevate the tone of Washington citizenship.

Francis P. Blair and Amos Kendall were the strongest of the political writers of their time, and the Globe in their hands was the most trenchant, savage and powerful party organ that has ever existed in this country.

A chapter of "Recollections of the Metropolitan Press," by Colonel Claiborne, printed in the New Orleans Delta in 1856, gives some interesting particulars concerning the leading men of the two great organs, the Intelligencer and the Globe. Commencing with the Intelligencer he says:

"It is certainly entitled to the merit of consistency, and there is no leading press, in either hemisphere, conducted with the same dignity, forbearance and decorum. In this respect it is a model to the newspaper world, while in point of ability it stands in the highest rank. Mr. Gales is now long past the meridian of life. He is a living political autobiography, having known intimately the statesmen, the diplomatists, the belles and the intrigues of three generations. What amusing memoirs he might write! He is generous and hospitable to a fault. A professed epicure, and fond of a rich cellar, the pleasures of the table, and the facility with which his purse opens to every application, have always kept him comparatively poor.

"Mr. Seaton is the junior editor and late mayor of Washington—an agreeable gentleman, of great public spirit and fine colloquial powers—a man of business and thrifty in his circumstances.

"Francis P. Blair, better known as 'Blair of the Globe,' commenced his career as an editor at Frankfort, Ky. Amos Kendall was at one time his associate. Originally friendly to Mr. Clay, and connected with him by marriage, he subsequently, with the great body of what was then called the new court party in Kentucky, attached himself to General Jackson, and followed the fortunes of that great man to Washington, where he established the Globe. It speedily became the national organ of the democratic party and a prevailing influence at the White House. It maintained its ascendency (notwithstanding occasional and violent opposition in the democratic ranks) to the close of the next administration. Mr. Blair was constantly consulted by both Jackson and Van Buren. It is certain he never betrayed them, though he had been charged with treachery to Mr. Clay. His paper was ultra from the outset, and gradually became radical, never exhibiting, at any crisis, the slightest hesitation or timidity. It never went for half-way measures. Its tone was bold, dogmatical and defiant. Its denunciations savage and ferocious. Its sarcasms bit like vipers, and friends and foes alike dreaded its fangs. As a partisan journal it was conducted with eminent ability and with rare fidelity and courage. It never betrayed its party, or was ungrateful to its friends. On the opposition it made indiscriminate war—it charged at the point of bayonet, and neither submission nor flight arrested its merciless tomahawk.

"Mr. Blair is considered a remarkably ugly man. I think otherwise. His features are hard, indeed, but his countenance evinces benevolence; nor does it belie him. His manners are bland—his temper mild; and one would never suppose that he could indite the terrible invectives that daily emanated from his prolific and vigorous pen. Mr. Blair wrote with singular facility. His most powerful leaders were jotted down upon his knee, in the office, on scraps of paper, and passed immediately to the compositor—mental daguerreotypes leaping from a brain of prodigious energy.

"During his residence in Washington he accumulated a handsome fortune. He lived in elegant style; and his mansion, consecrated and adorned by household divinities, whom to see was to worship, was constantly crowded with distinguished guests.

"If the Globe owed its reputation to Mr. Blair, he is mainly indebted for his fortune to the indomitable energy and financial talent of his partner, Mr. John C. Rives, who was charged with the business concerns of their extensive establishment. Mr. Rives is a huge, burly figure, from Franklin, the roughest county in Virginia. He has a strong and masculine matter-of-fact mind, a shaggy exterior and very brusque manners. Many of your Mississippi readers remember the late Robert Cook of Lexington, Holmes county, adjutant general of the state—an ungainly, rough-hewn, awkward man, of noble heart. He and Rives were cousins, and much alike, except that Cook was an Apollo compared with Rives. He is one of the shrewdest of men. His mind was originally purely arithmetical; but the printing office, the best school in the world, poured its radiance into it, and if he does not adorn everything that he touches, he has the gift of Midas, and turns things into gold. He made a large fortune out of the old Globe establishment, and still coins money out of the Congressional Globe. He never made but one failure; that was, when he bought the Bladensburg dueling ground, where Decatur fell, and turned gentleman farmer. In his office he is a colossus, but on his farm he was like Mr. Thomas Affleck, of 'our diggin's' and other agricultural quacks, a mere theorist, with the shabbiest stock, the meanest fences and the poorest crops in the country.

"Mr. Rives is a man of warm and humane heart. Merit in misfortune finds in him a steady friend. He is one of the few rich men I know who recur with pride to their former poverty; and it is his boast that, after he acquired wealth, and was looking around for a wife, he chose one from the bindery of his own office, where sixty young females were employed; and well may he boast, for, with characteristic good sense,

**Mr. Wm. W. Seaton.**

he selected one whose grace, beauty and virtue would ornament and honor the most elevated sphere.

"The career of Amos Kendall is so well known I shall merely glance at it. The son of a plain farmer—a hard-working student at a New England college—tutor in the family of Mr. Clay—a party editor in Kentucky—Postmaster General and biographer of Andrew Jackson—chief director of the National Telegraph—now quietly composing memoirs of his times for posthumous publications. He is universally known for his talents as a writer, his capacity for organization and details, his unconquerable industry and ability to labor. When I first saw him he had a whooping voice, an asthmatic cough, with a stooping frame and a phthisicky physiognomy, reminding one of Madame Roland's description of the great